

TALES FROM BIG SPIRIT

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The Land of Os

John Ramsay

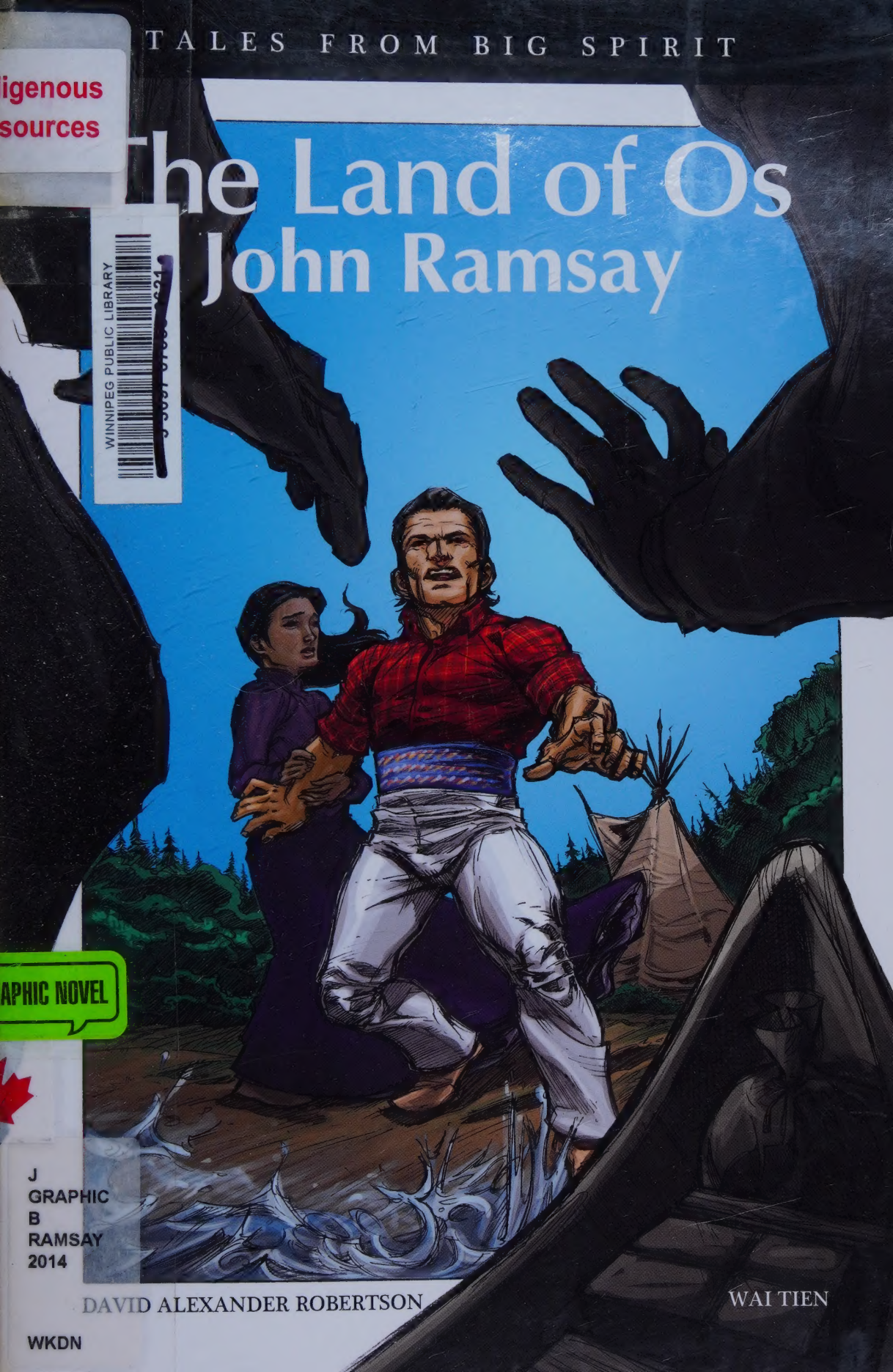
GRAPHIC NOVEL

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RAMSAY
2014

DAVID ALEXANDER ROBERTSON

WAI TIEN

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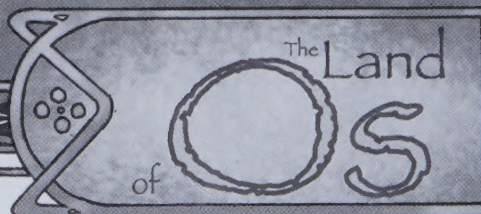


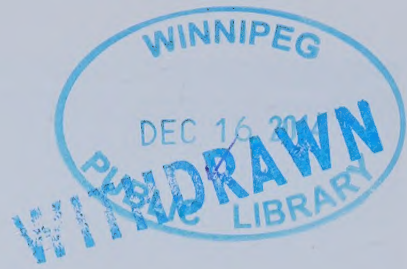
New Iceland

(Nyja Island)

Vatnsthing

(Lake Region)





TALES FROM BIG SPIRIT

The Land of Os

John Ramsay

BY DAVID ALEXANDER ROBERTSON
ILLUSTRATED BY WAI TIEN



HIGHWATER
PRESS

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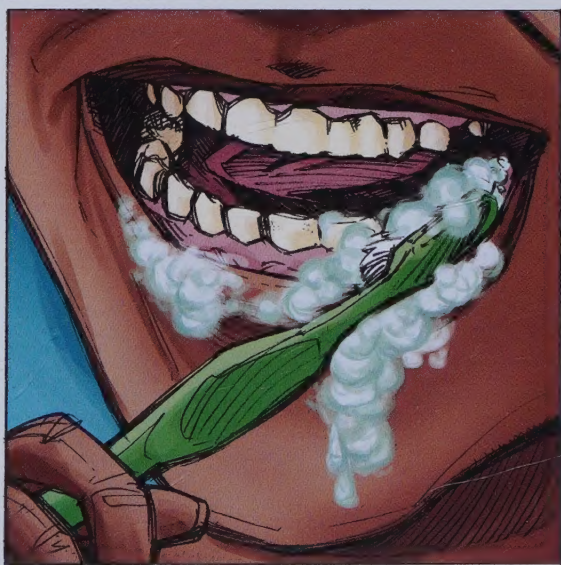
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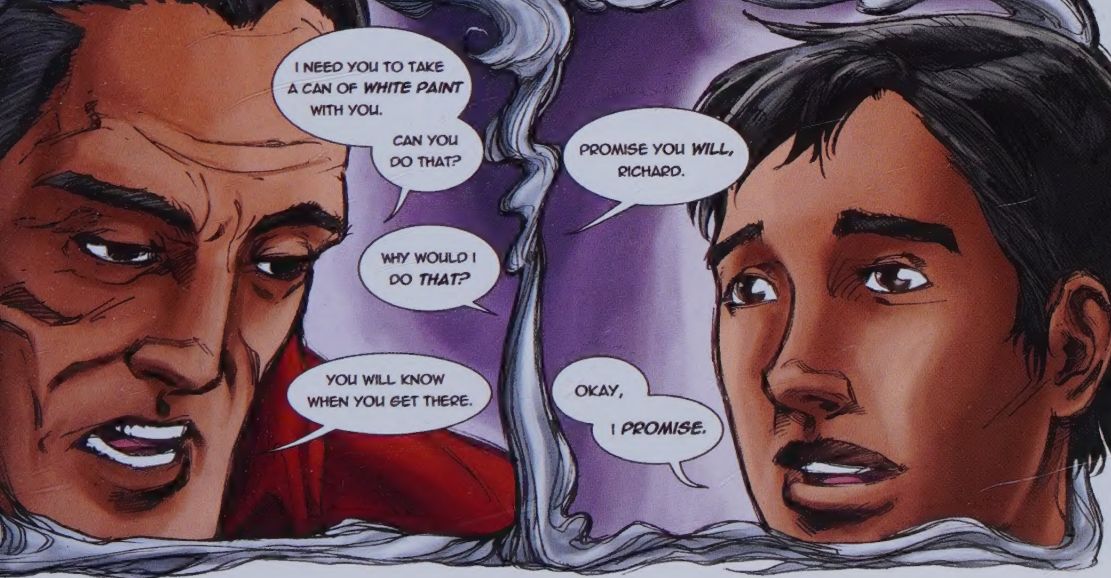
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ICELANDIC RIVER, MANITOBA



WHAT?

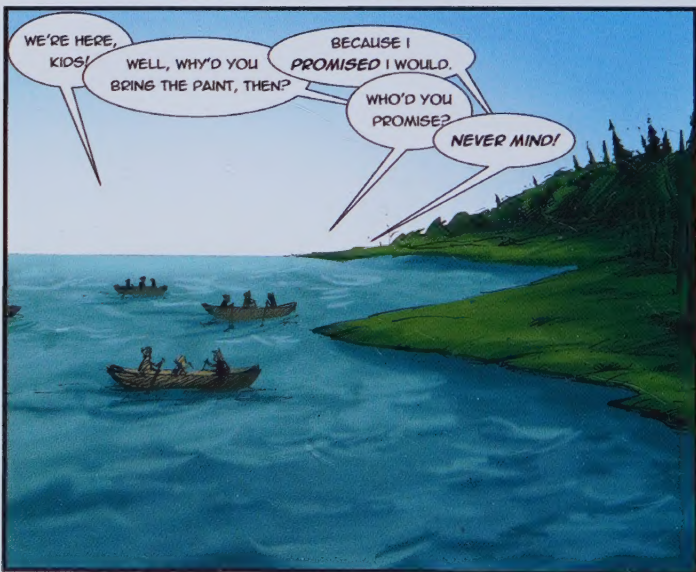
WHAT'S THE PAINT FOR?

PAINTING,

WHADDAYA THINK?

BUT WHAT'RE
YOU PAINTING?

I-I DON'T
KNOW.



WE'RE HERE,
KIDS!

WELL, WHY'D YOU
BRING THE PAINT, THEN?

BECAUSE I
PROMISED I WOULD.

WHO'D YOU
PROMISE?

NEVER MIND!



OVER THERE!
FOLLOW ME,
EVERYBODY.

THAT'S PRETTY
WEIRD, RICHARD.

IF YOU
ONLY KNEW!

The Land of Os



WELCOME, CHILDREN.

I'M HERE TO TALK
TO YOU ABOUT
MY GRANDFATHER.

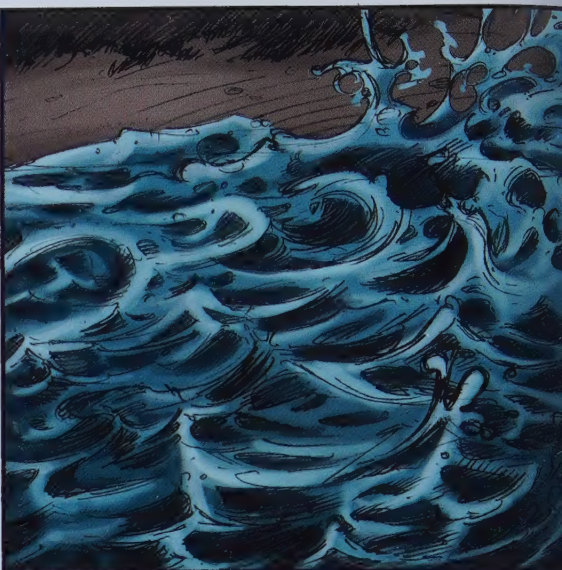
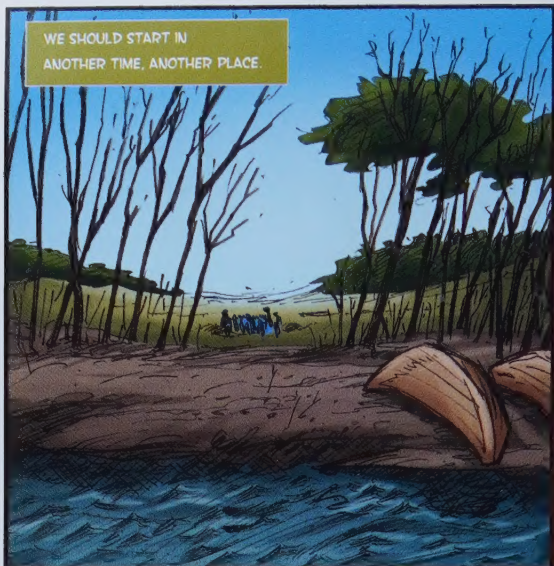
HIS NAME WAS
JOHN RAMSAY.

HERE, IN THIS AREA
OF MANITOBA, MANY YEARS
AGO, HE HELPED THE
ICELANDIC SETTLERS SURVIVE,
DESPITE GREAT STRUGGLES.

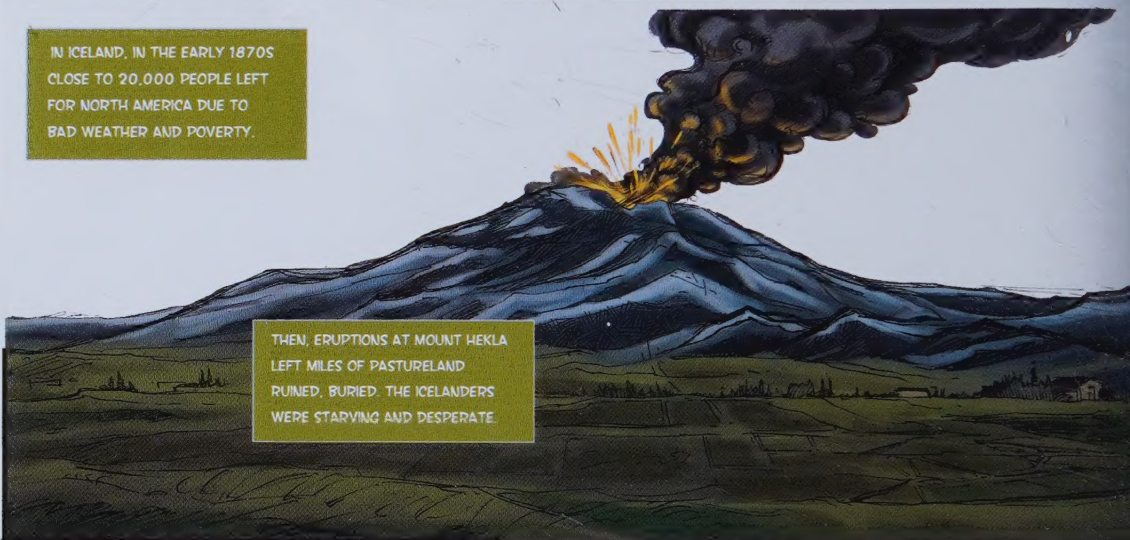
WHAT KIND
OF STRUGGLES?

I'LL TELL YOU
THAT VERY THING.

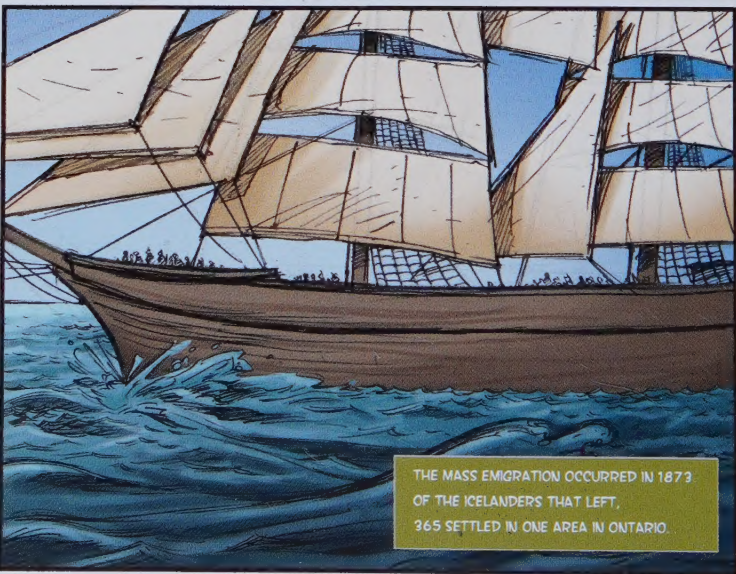
WE SHOULD START IN
ANOTHER TIME, ANOTHER PLACE.



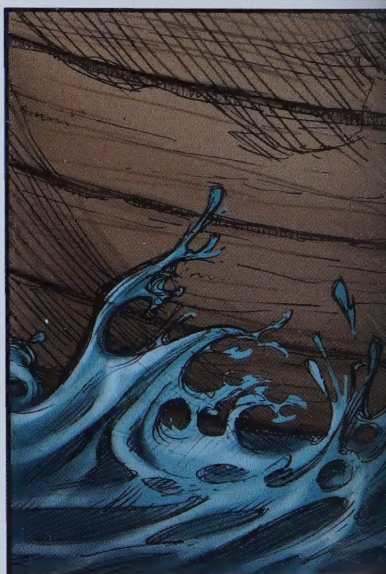
IN ICELAND, IN THE EARLY 1870S
CLOSE TO 20,000 PEOPLE LEFT
FOR NORTH AMERICA DUE TO
BAD WEATHER AND POVERTY.

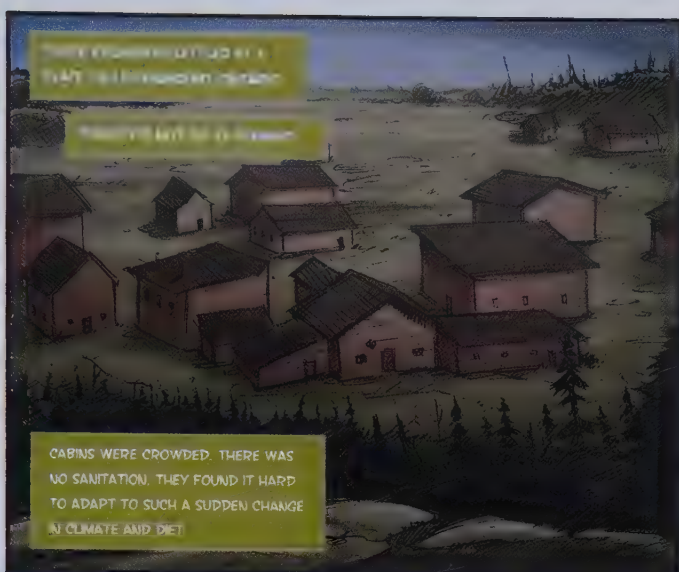


THEN, ERUPTIONS AT MOUNT HEKLA
LEFT MILES OF PASTURELAND
RUINED, BURIED. THE ICELANDERS
WERE STARVING AND DESPERATE.



THE MASS EMIGRATION OCCURRED IN 1873
OF THE ICELANDERS THAT LEFT,
365 SETTLED IN ONE AREA IN ONTARIO.





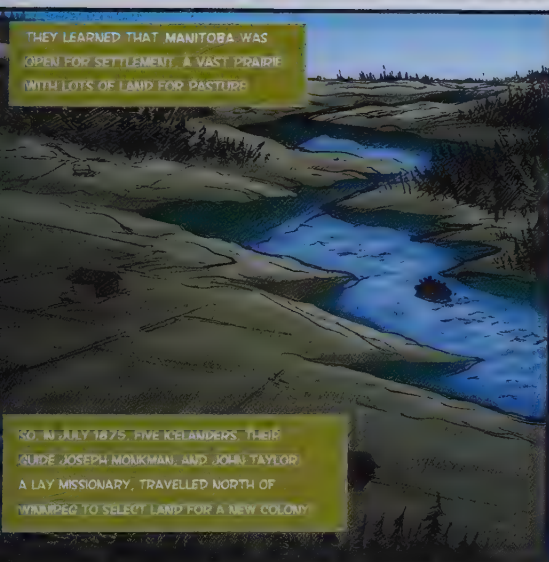
THEY FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO
ADAPT TO THE NEW ENVIRONMENT

THEY WERE NOT USED TO THE
COLD

CABINS WERE CROWDED. THERE WAS
NO SANITATION. THEY FOUND IT HARD
TO ADAPT TO SUCH A SUDDEN CHANGE
IN CLIMATE AND DIET

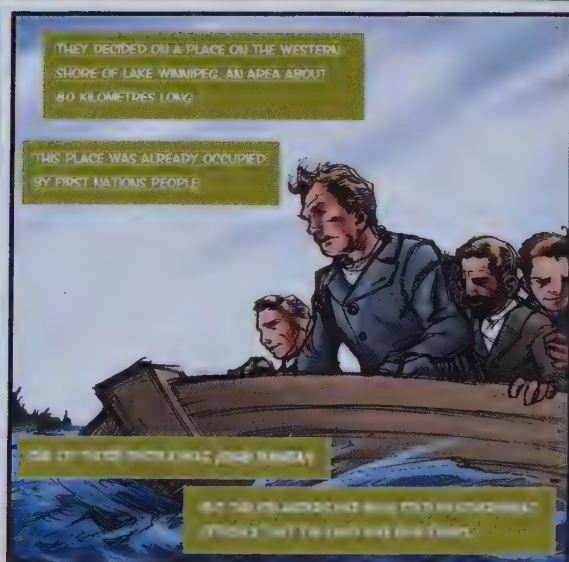


THESE CONDITIONS LED TO SICKNESS AND
DEATH. THE SETTLERS COULD NOT STAY
WHERE THEY WERE



THEY LEARNED THAT MANITOBA WAS
OPEN FOR SETTLEMENT. A VAST PRAIRIE
WITH LOTS OF LAND FOR PASTURE

SO, IN JULY 1875, FIVE IRELANDERS, THEIR
GUIDE JOSEPH MONKMAN, AND JOHN TAYLOR,
A LAY MISSIONARY, TRAVELLED NORTH OF
WINNIPEG TO SELECT LAND FOR A NEW COLONY

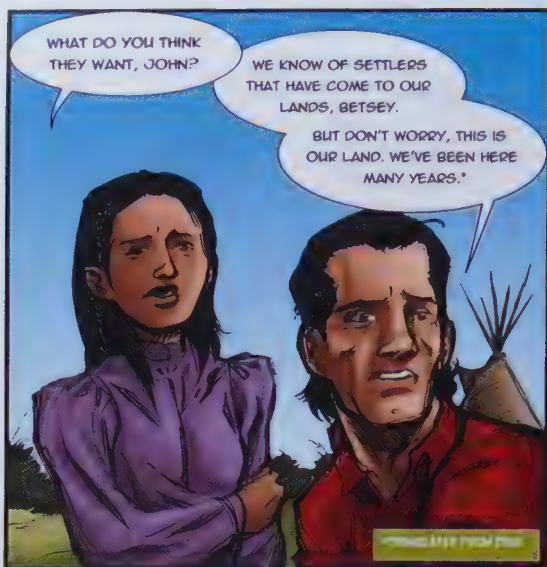


THEY DECIDED ON A PLACE ON THE WESTERN
SHORE OF LAKE WINNIPEG. AN AREA ABOUT
80 KILOMETRES LONG

THIS PLACE WAS ALREADY OCCUPIED
BY FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE

ONE OF THESE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

SAID THE IRELANDERS HAD NO RIGHT TO SETTLE THERE
"BECAUSE THAT TERRITORY WAS OURS"



ON OCTOBER 2, 1873, THE GOVERNMENT BEGINS TO REMOVE THE
INDIAN TRIBES FROM THE LANDS THEY HAVE OCCUPIED.

BUT THE WHITE PEOPLE WANTED TO BE SURE THEY COULD GO
THROUGH THE WILDERNESS STAYS IN THE WOODS THAT
WAS THE HOME OF THE INDIAN PEOPLE.

IT WAS THIS THAT MADE THE INDIAN PEOPLE GO ON TO THE NEW LAND.



FROM THE TV SERIES "THE MOUNTAIN MEN"
WRITTEN BY JIMMY M. HARRIS
JOHN HARRIS, DIRECTOR



LOOK, WE WERE TOLD THE INDIANS WOULD BE REMOVED FROM THIS PLACE BY THE TIME WE ARRIVED.

NO MATTER. THEY WILL BE MOVED. THIS IS OUR HOME, NOT THEIRS. WE'VE BEEN TOLD AS MUCH.



WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?

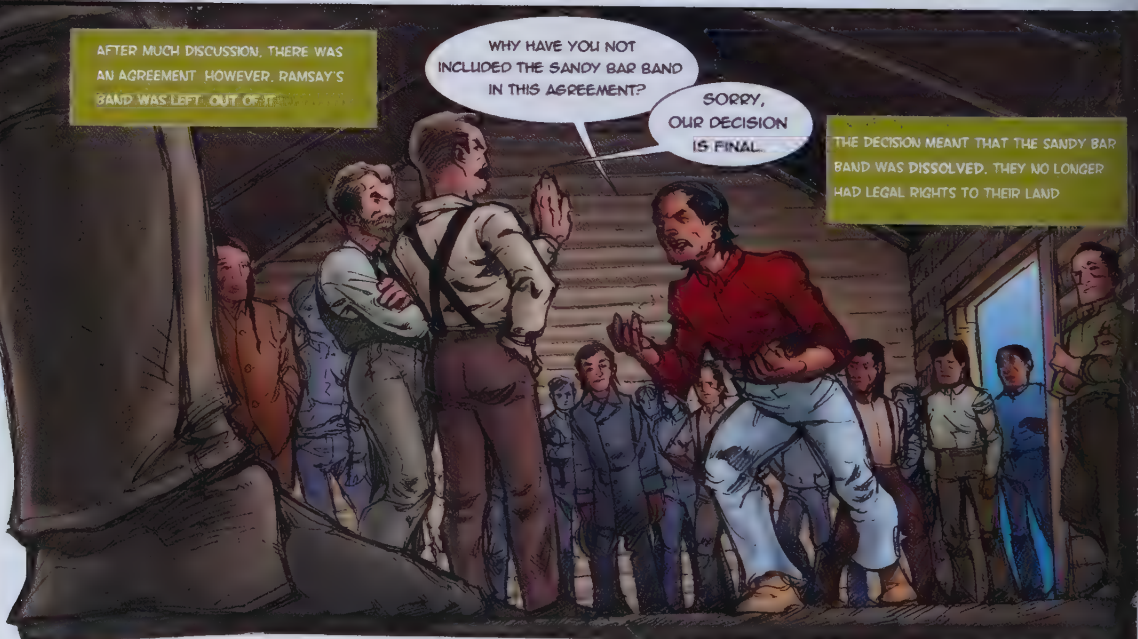
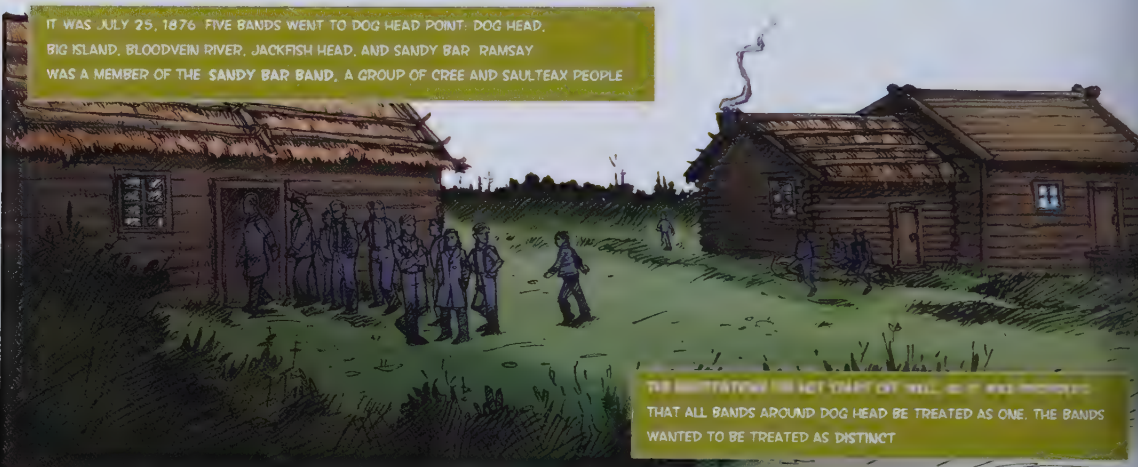
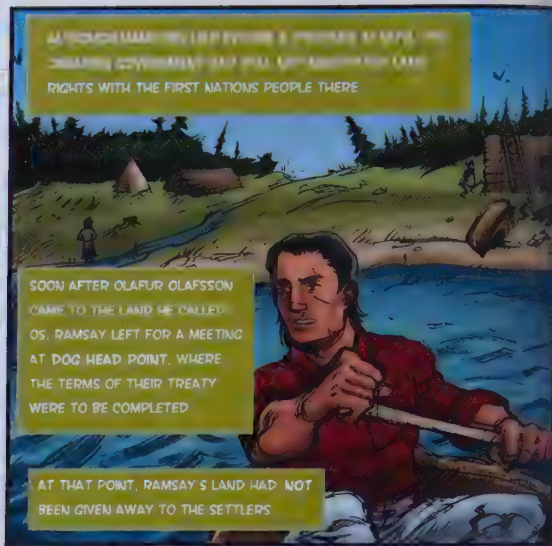
LOOK, I CANNOT UNDERSTAND YOU, BUT THIS IS OUR HOME NOW, SIR.

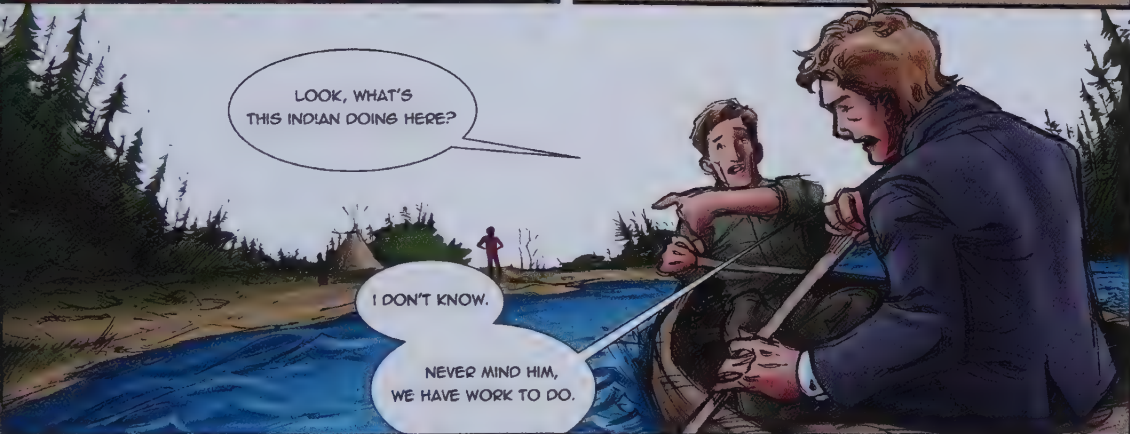
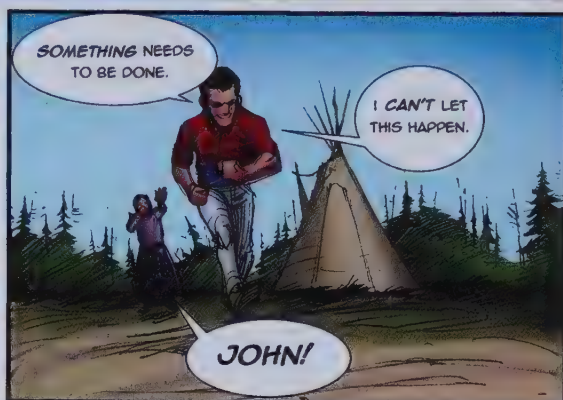
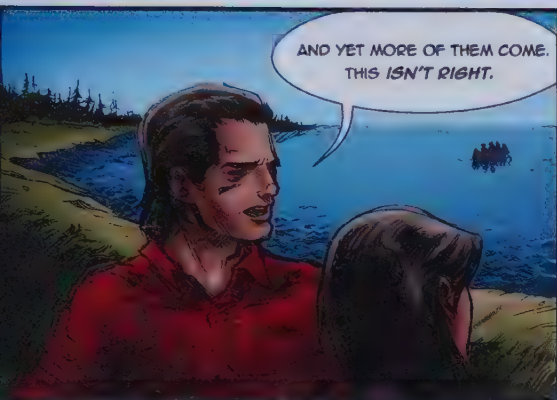
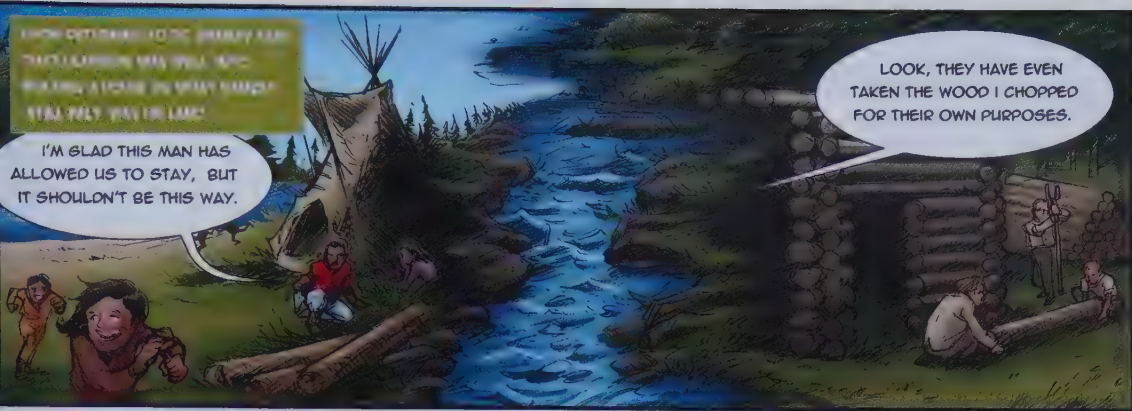


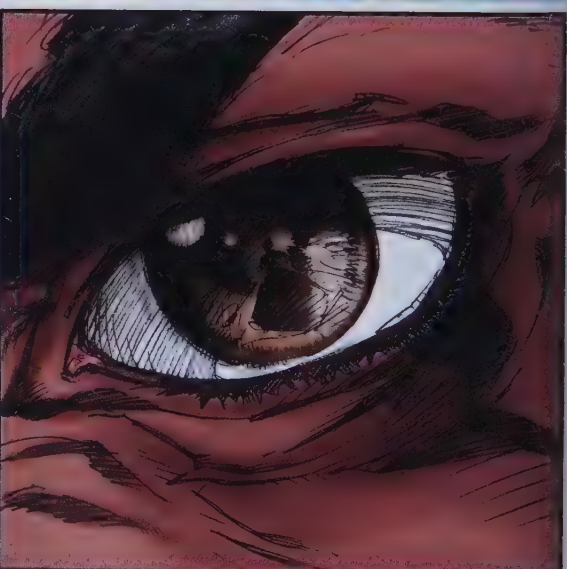
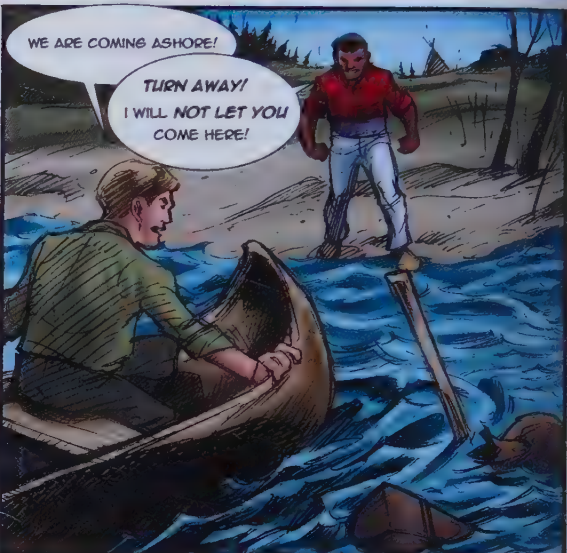
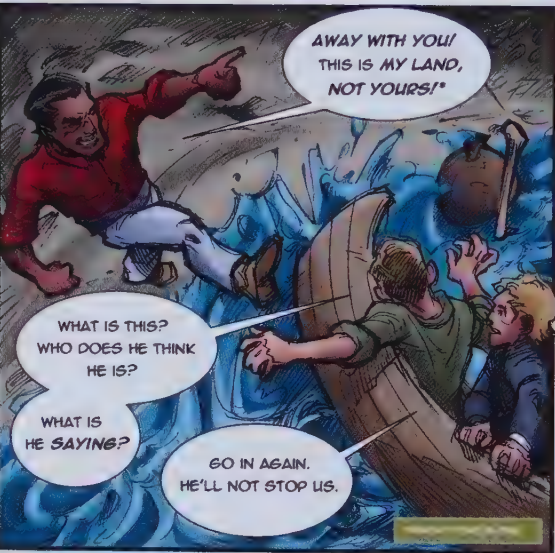
WE WILL START BUILDING A HOME HERE, AND ALL THE TROUBLES WE HAVE BEEN THROUGH WILL BE FORGOTTEN.

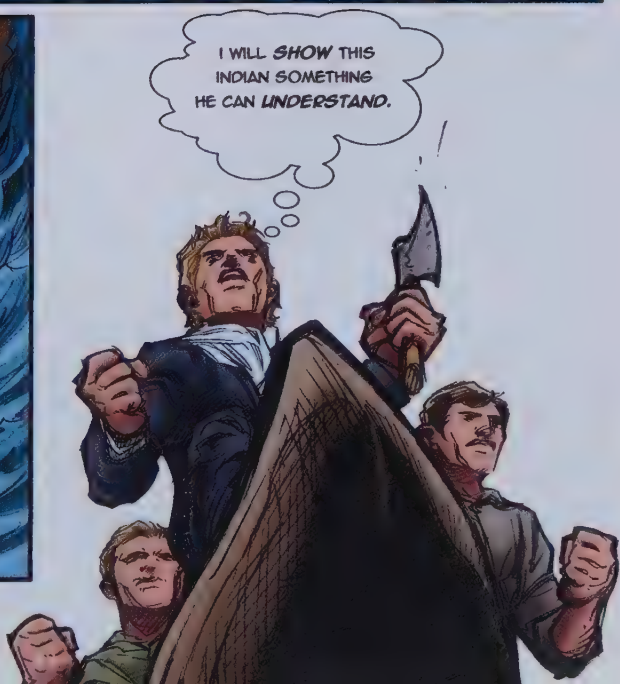


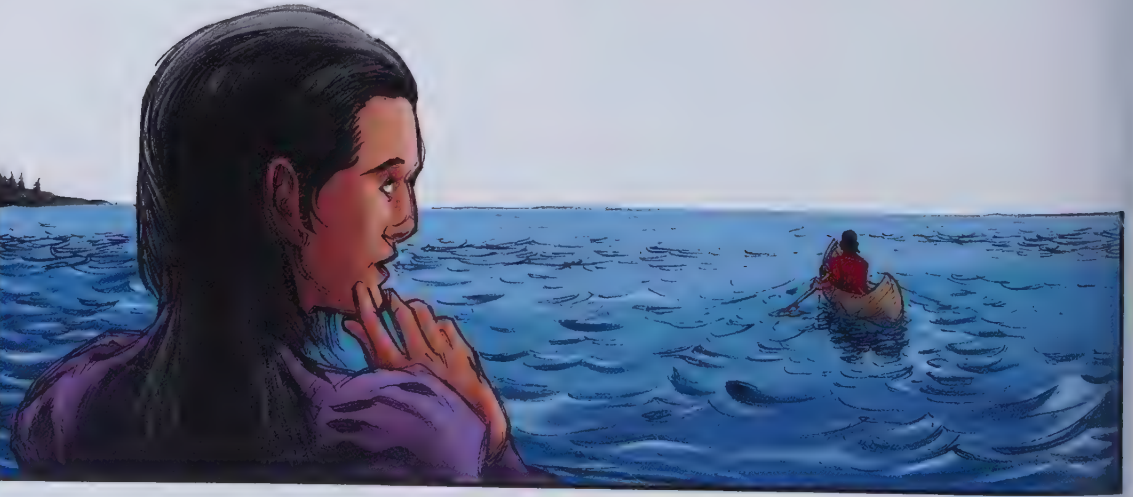
I WILL CALL THIS PLACE "OS".

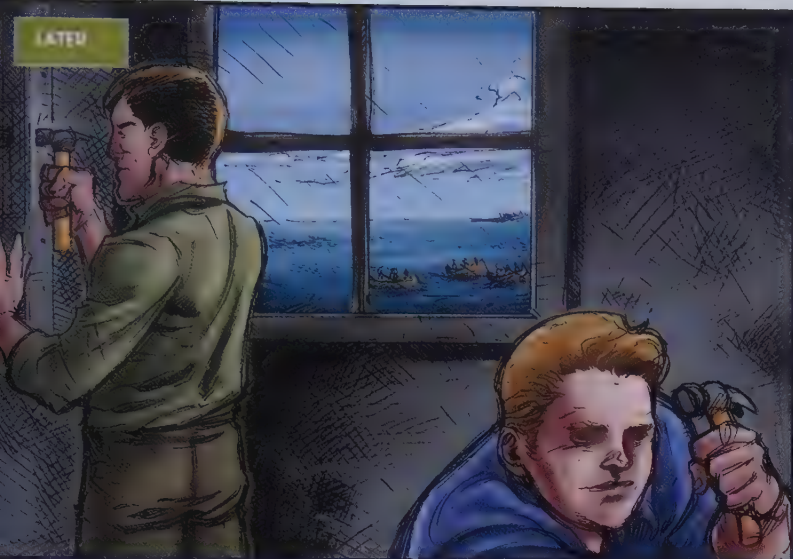




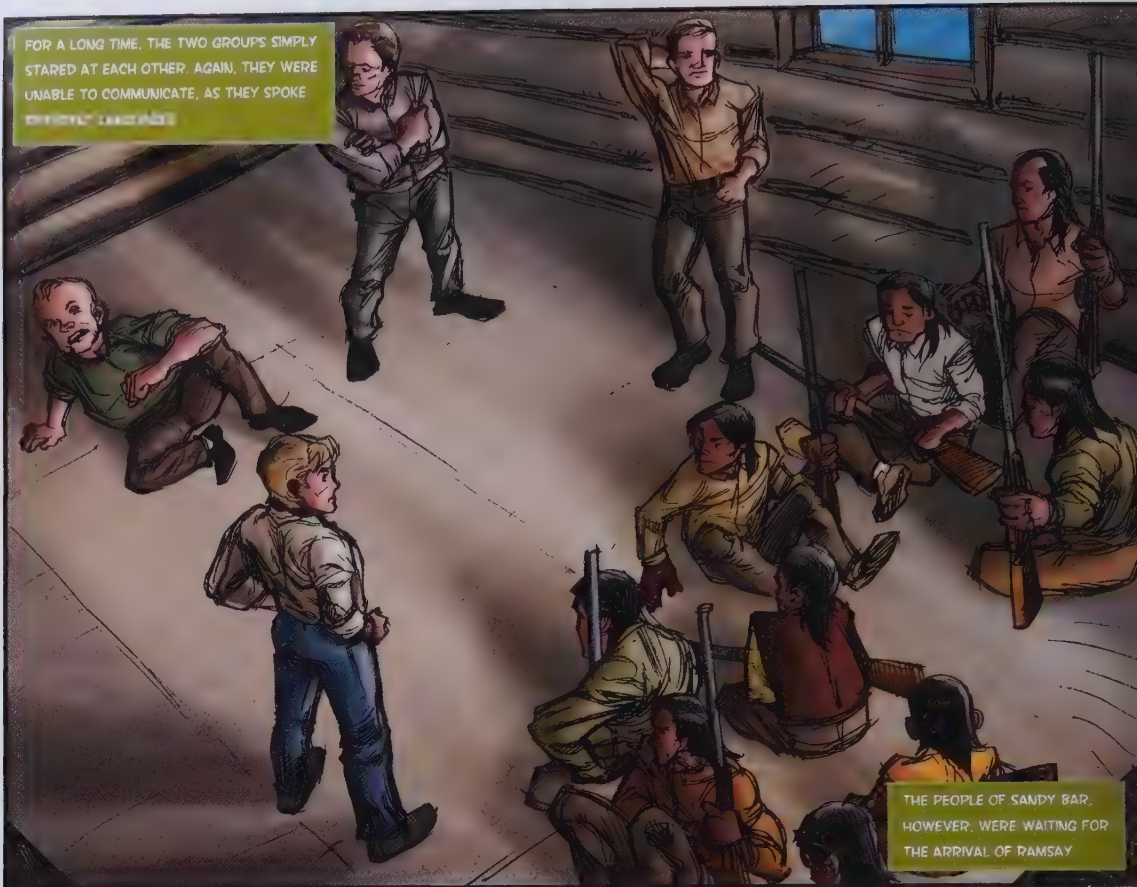




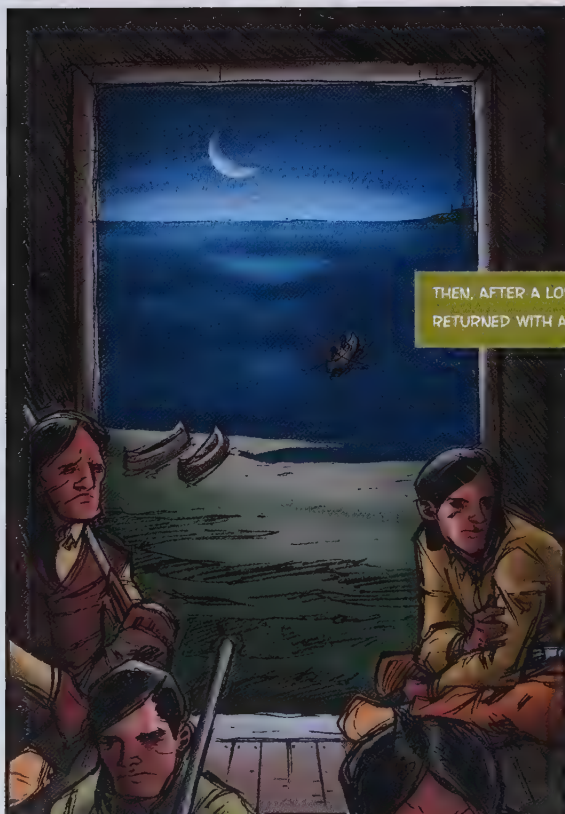




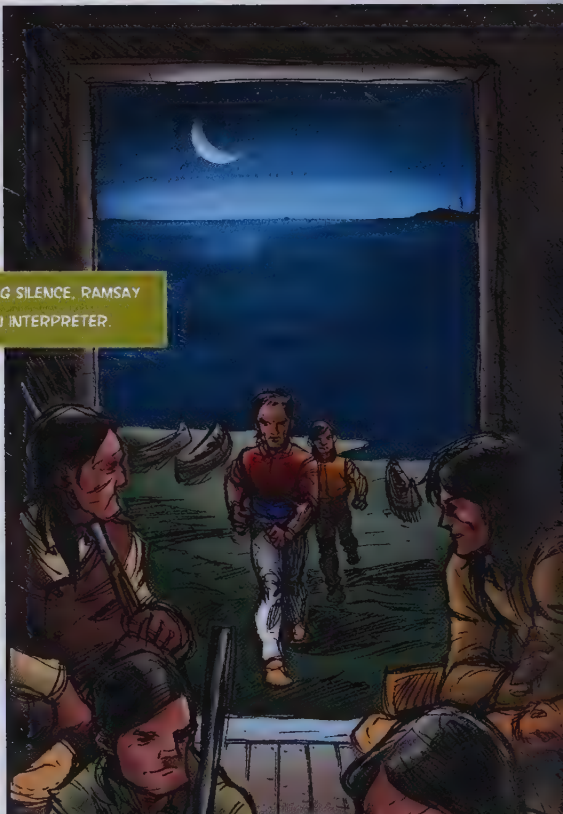
FOR A LONG TIME, THE TWO GROUPS SIMPLY STARED AT EACH OTHER. AGAIN, THEY WERE UNABLE TO COMMUNICATE, AS THEY SPOKE DIFFERENT LANGUAGES.

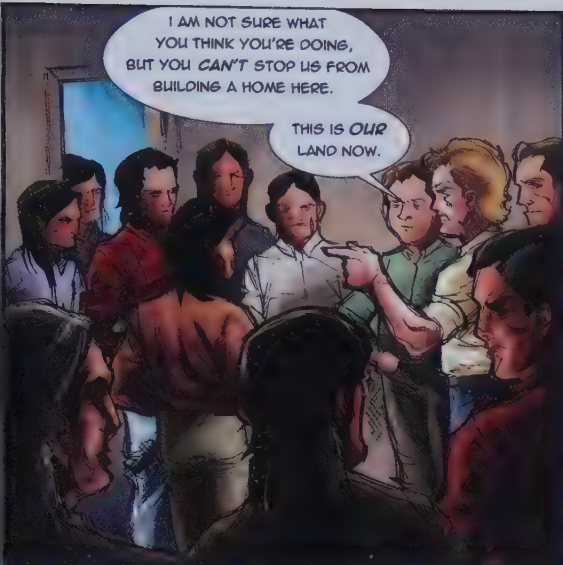


THE PEOPLE OF SANDY BAR, HOWEVER, WERE WAITING FOR THE ARRIVAL OF RAMSAY.



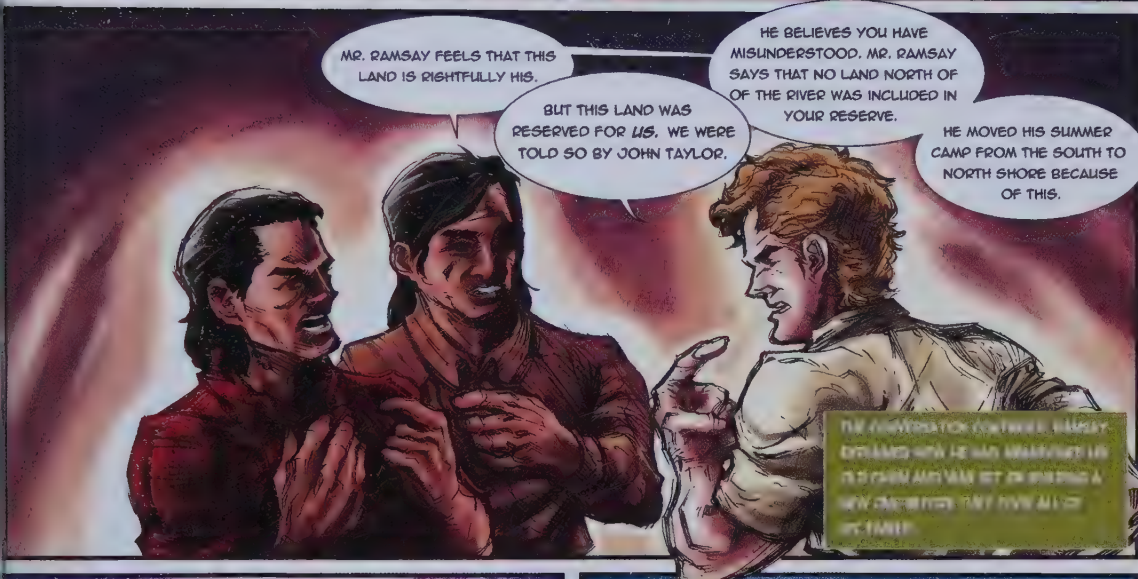
THEN, AFTER A LONG SILENCE, RAMSAY RETURNED WITH AN INTERPRETER.





I AM NOT SURE WHAT YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING, BUT YOU CAN'T STOP US FROM BUILDING A HOME HERE.

THIS IS OUR LAND NOW.



MR. RAMSAY FEELS THAT THIS LAND IS RIGHTFULLY HIS.

BUT THIS LAND WAS RESERVED FOR US. WE WERE TOLD SO BY JOHN TAYLOR.

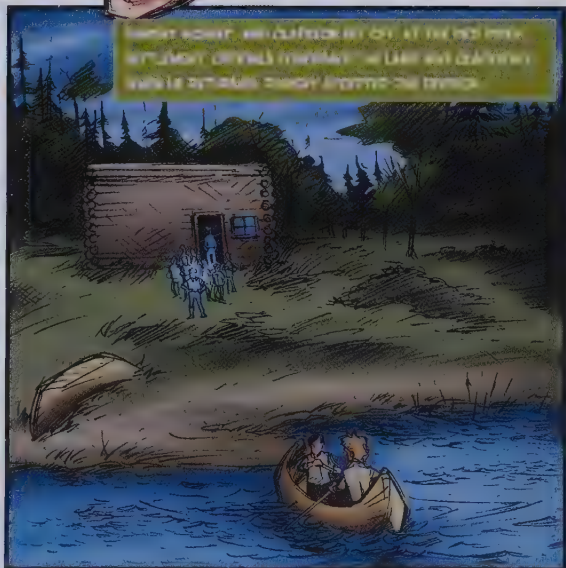
HE BELIEVES YOU HAVE MISUNDERSTOOD. MR. RAMSAY SAYS THAT NO LAND NORTH OF OF THE RIVER WAS INCLUDED IN YOUR RESERVE.

HE MOVED HIS SUMMER CAMP FROM THE SOUTH TO NORTH SHORE BECAUSE OF THIS.

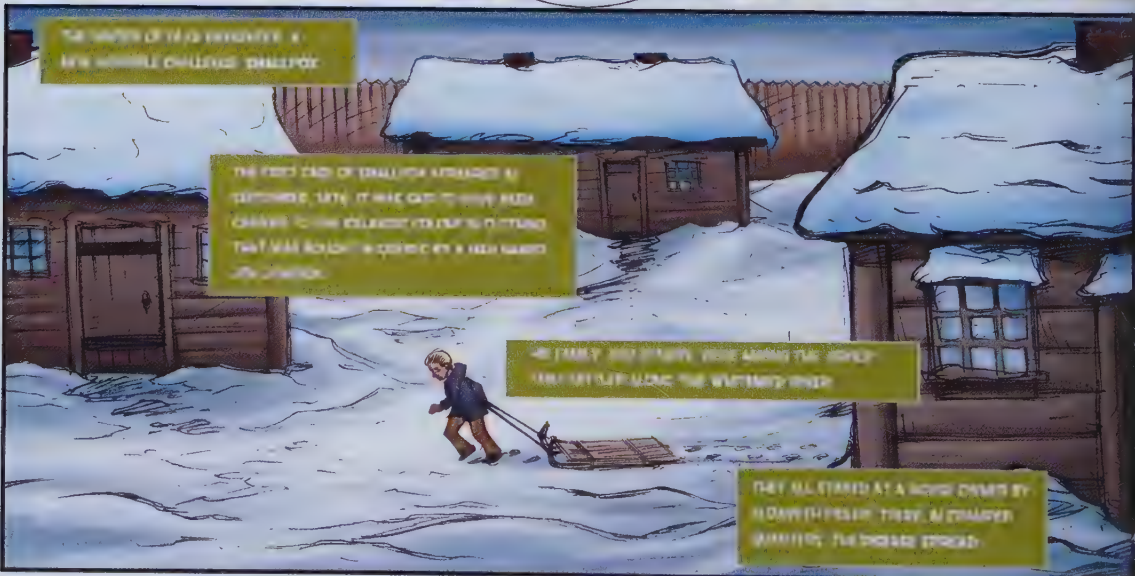
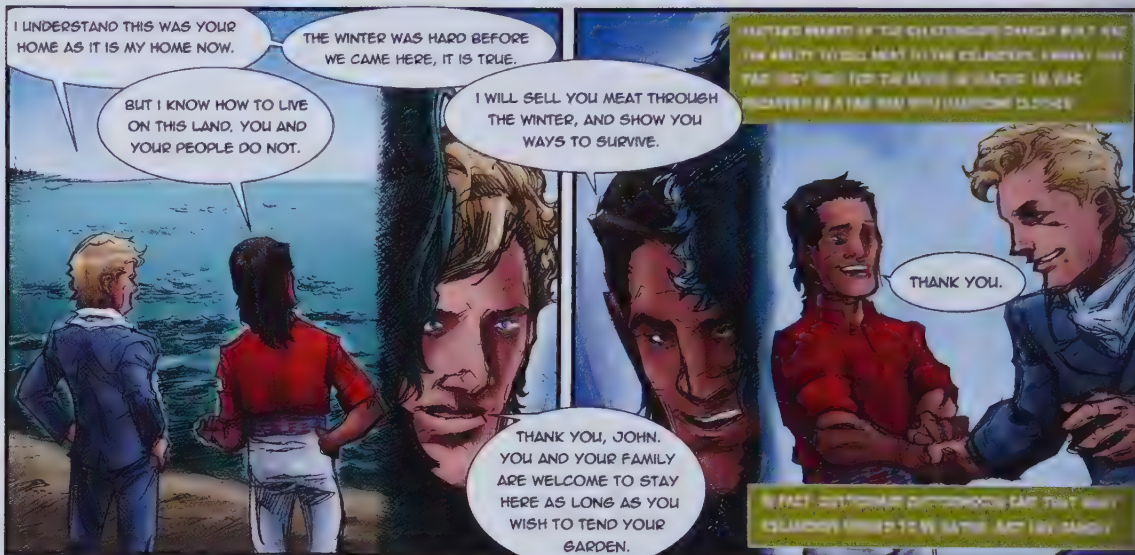
THE NEGOTIATION CONTINUES. RAMSAY EXPLAINS HOW HE HAS MANAGED TO GET A CHAIN AND HAS SET ON BUILDING A NEW ONE BECAUSE THEY HAVE ALL OF IT TAKEN.



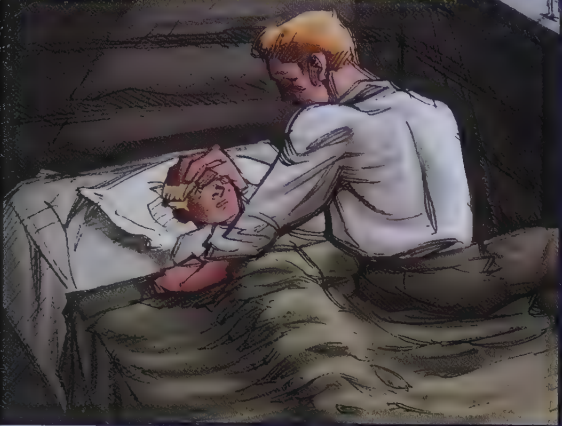
LOOK, WHY DON'T I GO SPEAK WITH OFFICIALS AT THE RED RIVER SETTLEMENT? WE CAN HAVE THIS CLEARED UP FOR GOOD. I AM CERTAIN OUR LAND EXTENDS TO THE NORTH SHORE.



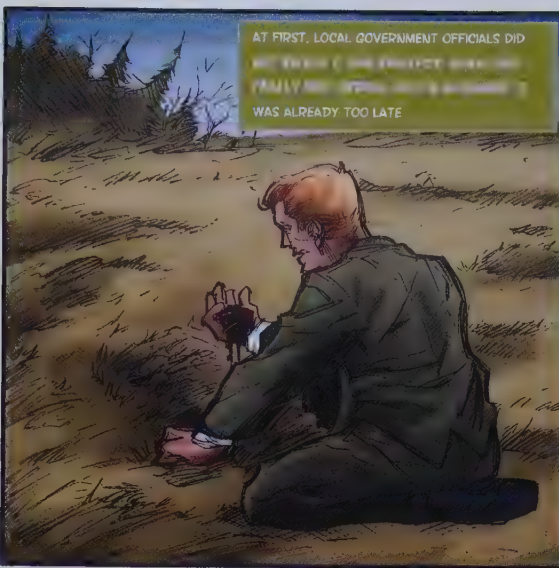
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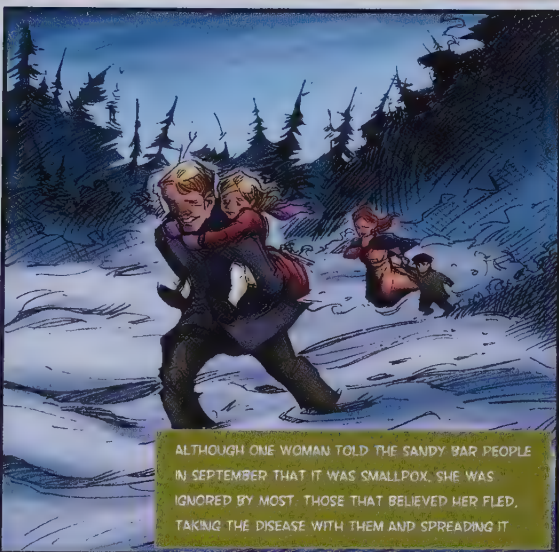
THE FIRST VICTIM OF SMALLPOX WAS A TWO-YEAR-OLD BOY
DIED AT THE END OF MAY. AFTER THAT THE
ISLANDERS CALLED THE DISEASE "SMALLPOX" IN ICELANDIC.



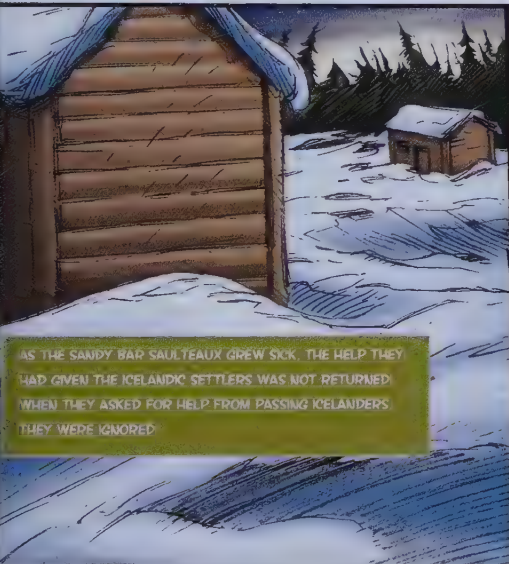
AT FIRST, LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS DID
NOT BELIEVE THE DISEASE WAS
FATAL. BUT BY THE END OF
JUNE, IT WAS ALREADY TOO LATE.



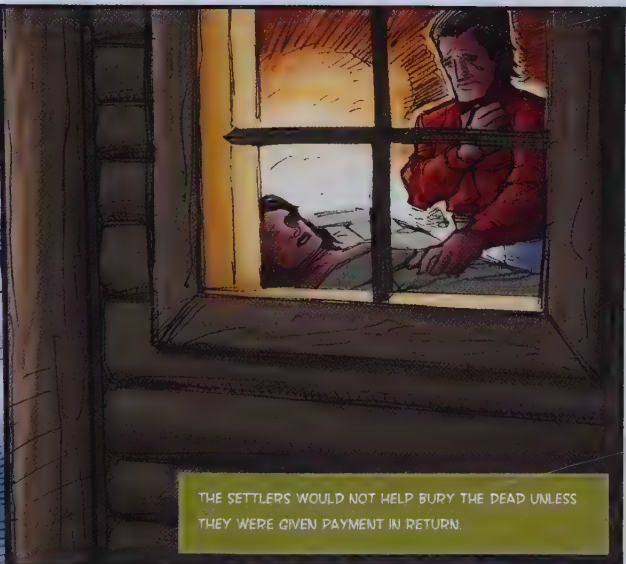
AT HIS FISHING STATION AT SANDY BAR,
RAMSAY THOUGHT HE WAS SAFE FROM
THE DISEASE.



ALTHOUGH ONE WOMAN TOLD THE SANDY BAR PEOPLE
IN SEPTEMBER THAT IT WAS SMALLPOX, SHE WAS
IGNORED BY MOST. THOSE THAT BELIEVED HER FLED,
TAKING THE DISEASE WITH THEM AND SPREADING IT.



AS THE SANDY BAR SAULTEAUX GREW SICK, THE HELP THEY
HAD GIVEN THE ICELANDIC SETTLERS WAS NOT RETURNED.
WHEN THEY ASKED FOR HELP FROM PASSING ICELANDERS,
THEY WERE IGNORED.



THE SETTLERS WOULD NOT HELP BURY THE DEAD UNLESS
THEY WERE GIVEN PAYMENT IN RETURN.

WHEN KAREN'S ENTIRE FAMILY WAS
INFECTED WITH SMALLPOX.

BEFORE THE WINTER WAS OVER.

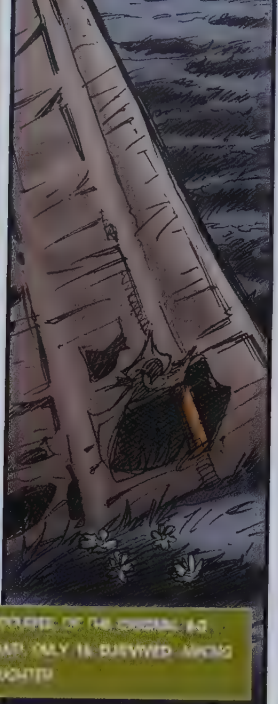
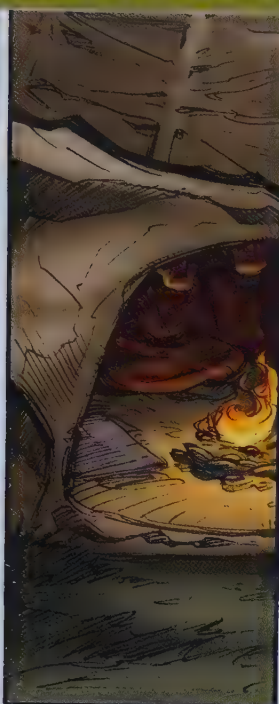


KAREN LOST HER MOTHER AND TWO SIBLINGS. THE
DANGEROUS DISEASE SPREAD, BUT KAREN WAS
PROTECTED FROM THE SCARS LEFT BY THE VIRUS.



WHEN THE ICE COULD BE MOVED, THE PART OF THE ROAD DETACHED. THEY
DID NOT HAVE TRAILS ON THE SOUTHERN SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN RANGE.
JUST SOUTH OF ICE, THE ISOLATED VILLAGE OF SAKH AND MAY HAVE
BEHIND ON THE ROAD OF ICE. THESE WARRIORS MAY HAVE BEEN TO
ATTEND TO THE DEATH.

HE FINALLY FOLLOWED THE ROAD TO THE LARGE RIVER. THERE, HE SAW A CROWD
FROM THE LASS. WORKING PEOPLE WERE THERE, DISPERATE, LACK, AND TRYING
TO SURVIVE UNDER A THICK TENT, AMONG THE SHALLOW GRASS OF THE TENT.

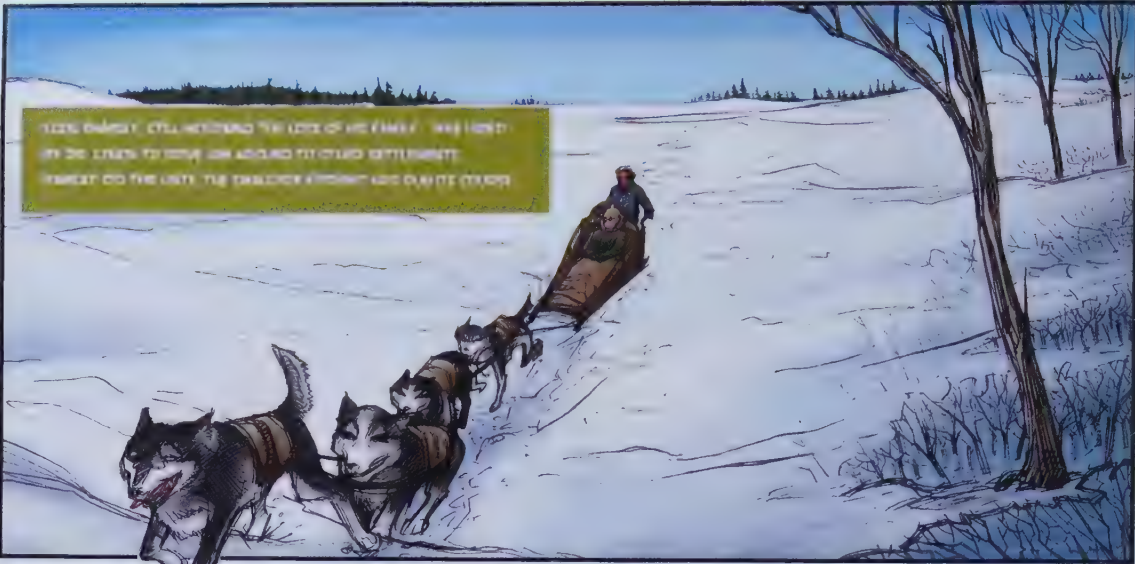


WHEN THE DISEASE HAD RUN ITS COURSE, OF THE COMMUNITY, NO
MEMBERS OF THE CLASH HAD PASSED, ONLY 11 SURVIVED, AMONG
THEM: WITH HENRY AND HIS DAUGHTER.



THE SMALLITY REMAINS, WHICH NO DEVIATED,
THE COMMUNITY OF CLASH HAD REACHED THE END
OF THEIR HILLARY YOUNG STATION.

THE FOLLOWING YEAR, THE FOLLOWING TOOK
CONTROL OF THE FLOWING.

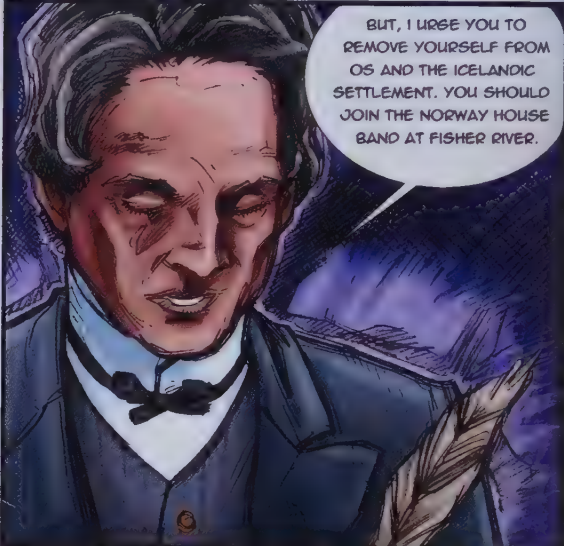


1850s EMIGRANT, STILL MISSING THE LOVE OF HIS FAMILY. HE HOPES TO BE ABLE TO JOIN AN AROUND TO OTHER SETTLEMENTS. HE MUST DO THE UNITS, THE EMIGRANT KITCHEN AND ON THE TRUCK.

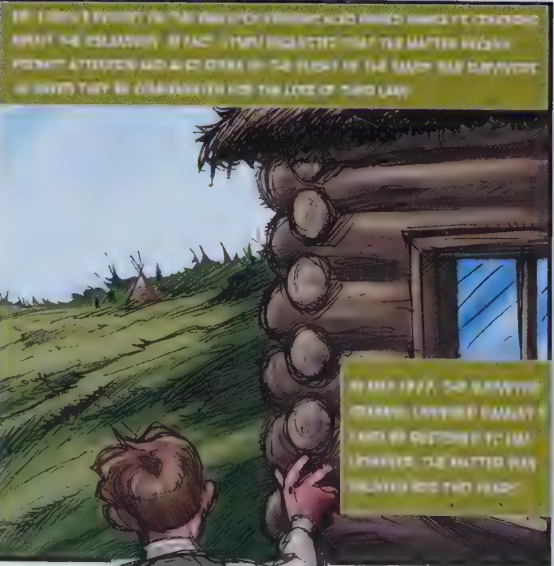


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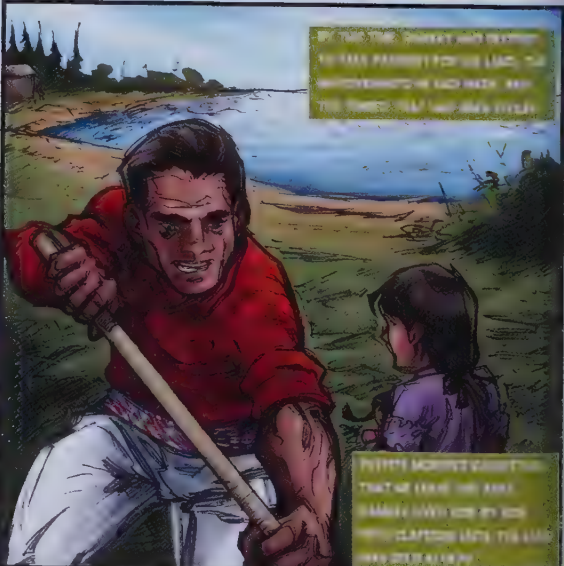


BUT, I URGE YOU TO REMOVE YOURSELF FROM OS AND THE ICELANDIC SETTLEMENT. YOU SHOULD JOIN THE NORWAY HOUSE BAND AT FISHER RIVER.



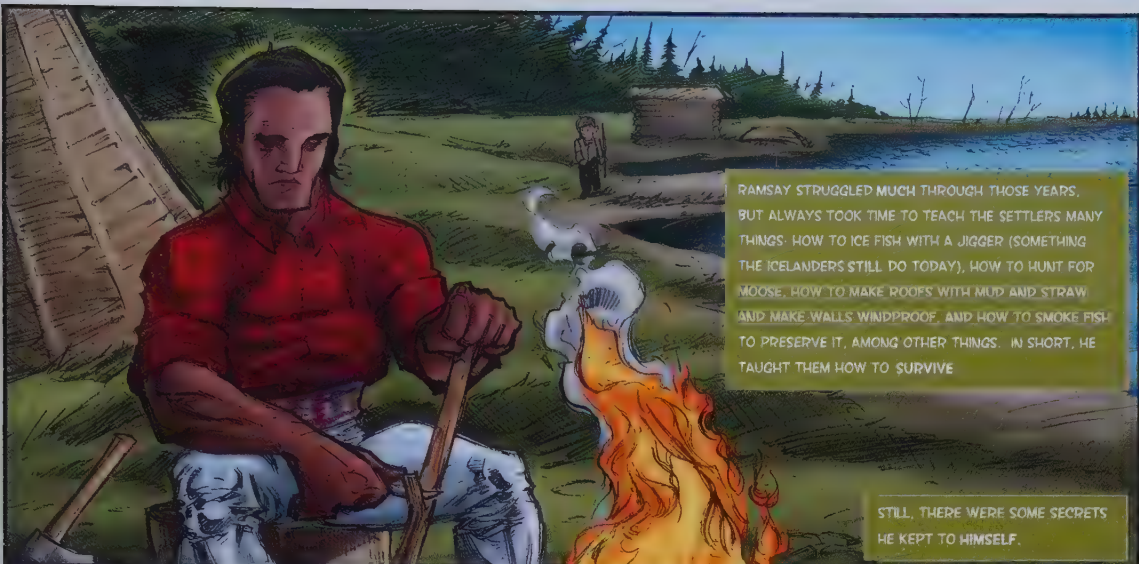
HE HOPES TO BE ABLE TO JOIN AN AROUND TO OTHER SETTLEMENTS. HE MUST DO THE UNITS, THE EMIGRANT KITCHEN AND ON THE TRUCK.

IN 1850, THE EMIGRANT KITCHEN, MISSING THE LOVE OF HIS FAMILY. HE HOPES TO BE ABLE TO JOIN AN AROUND TO OTHER SETTLEMENTS. HE MUST DO THE UNITS, THE EMIGRANT KITCHEN AND ON THE TRUCK.



HE HOPES TO BE ABLE TO JOIN AN AROUND TO OTHER SETTLEMENTS. HE MUST DO THE UNITS, THE EMIGRANT KITCHEN AND ON THE TRUCK.

HE HOPES TO BE ABLE TO JOIN AN AROUND TO OTHER SETTLEMENTS. HE MUST DO THE UNITS, THE EMIGRANT KITCHEN AND ON THE TRUCK.



RAMSAY STRUGGLED MUCH THROUGH THOSE YEARS, BUT ALWAYS TOOK TIME TO TEACH THE SETTLERS MANY THINGS. HOW TO ICE FISH WITH A JIGGER (SOMETHING THE ICELANDERS STILL DO TODAY), HOW TO HUNT FOR MOOSE, HOW TO MAKE ROOFS WITH MUD AND STRAW, AND MAKE WALLS WINDPROOF, AND HOW TO SMOKE FISH TO PRESERVE IT, AMONG OTHER THINGS. IN SHORT, HE TAUGHT THEM HOW TO SURVIVE

STILL, THERE WERE SOME SECRETS HE KEPT TO HIMSELF.



NOW WHAT ARE YOU PLANNING TO DO WITH **THESE** THINGS?

HA HA! BIRCH WILL NEVER DO TO MAKE A BOW AND ARROW!

I'M GOING TO MAKE A BOW AND ARROW.

WHY NOT?

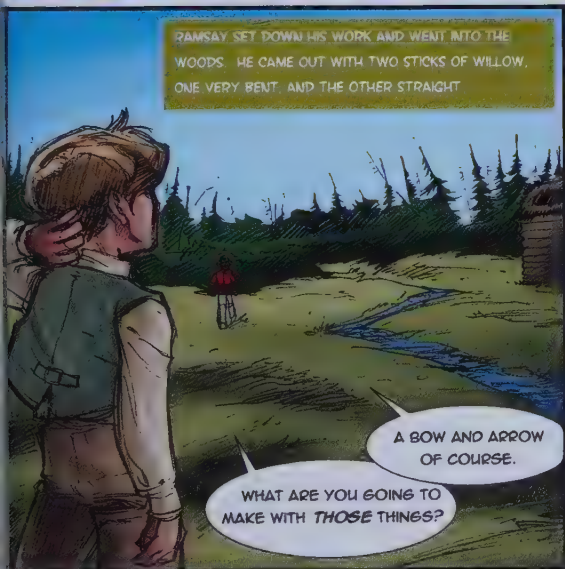


HEY!

BECAUSE!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

THERE IS NO BEND TO THIS WOOD, CHILD.



RAMSAY SET DOWN HIS WORK AND WENT INTO THE WOODS. HE CAME OUT WITH TWO STICKS OF WILLOW, ONE VERY BENT, AND THE OTHER STRAIGHT

A BOW AND ARROW OF COURSE.

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO MAKE WITH **THOSE** THINGS?



WHAT'S THE STRAIGHT ONE GOING TO BE?

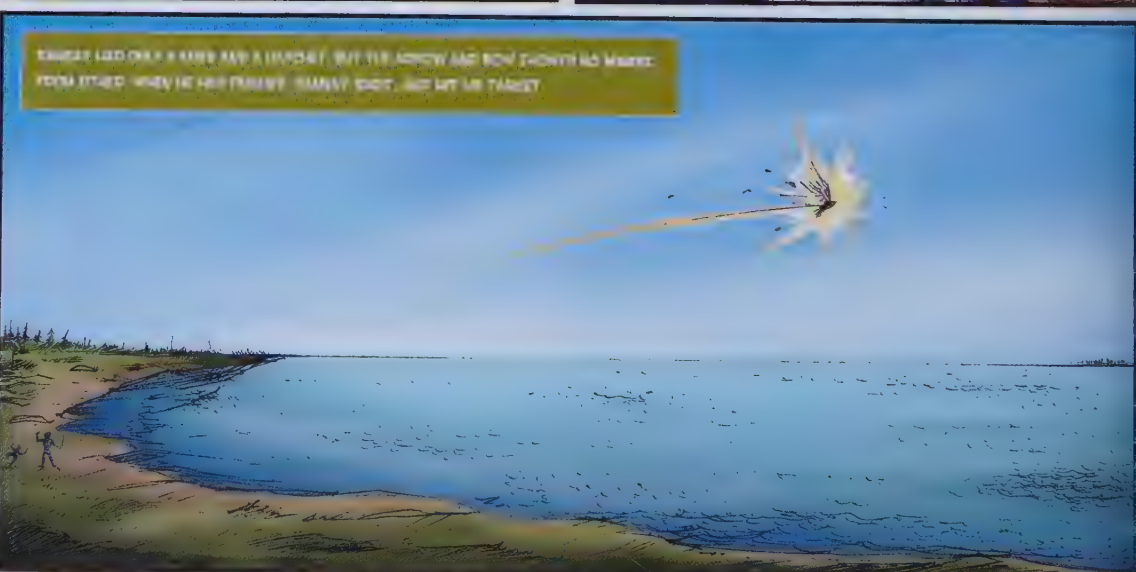
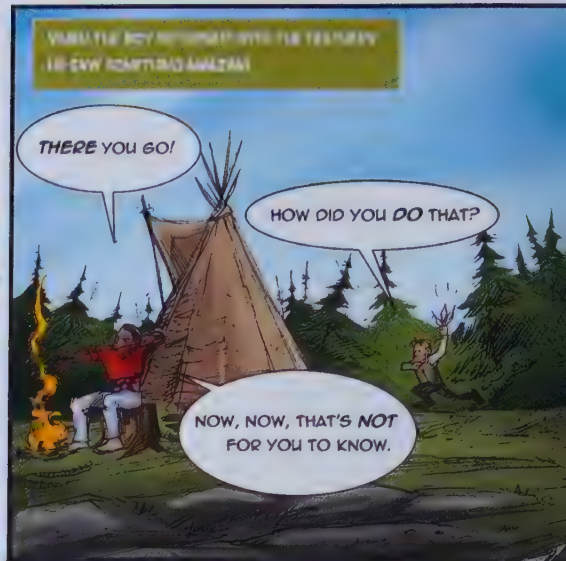
THE BOW.

BUT ...BUT HOW CAN **THAT** BE? YOU'RE GOING TO MAKE THAT ZIG-ZAGGED PIECE OF WOOD THE **ARROW**?

YES.

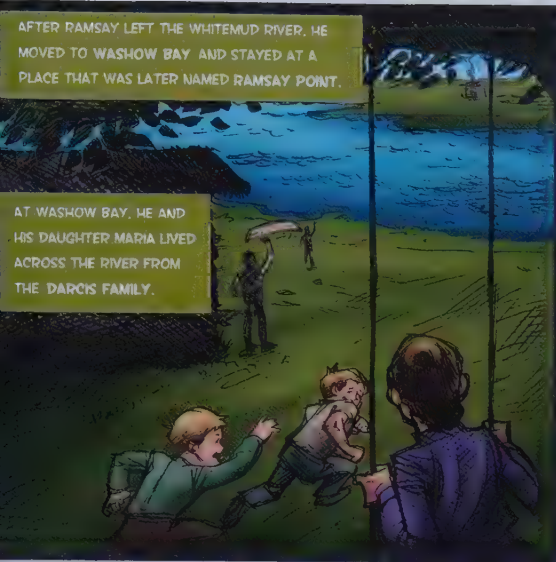
THAT BENT STICK WILL NEVER BE AN ARROW. WHY DON'T YOU USE THE **BIRCH** I BROUGHT FOR THE ARROW?

JUST WAIT AND SEE.



AFTER RAMSAY LEFT THE WHITEMUD RIVER, HE MOVED TO WASHOW BAY AND STAYED AT A PLACE THAT WAS LATER NAMED RAMSAY POINT.

AT WASHOW BAY, HE AND HIS DAUGHTER MARIA LIVED ACROSS THE RIVER FROM THE DARCIS FAMILY.



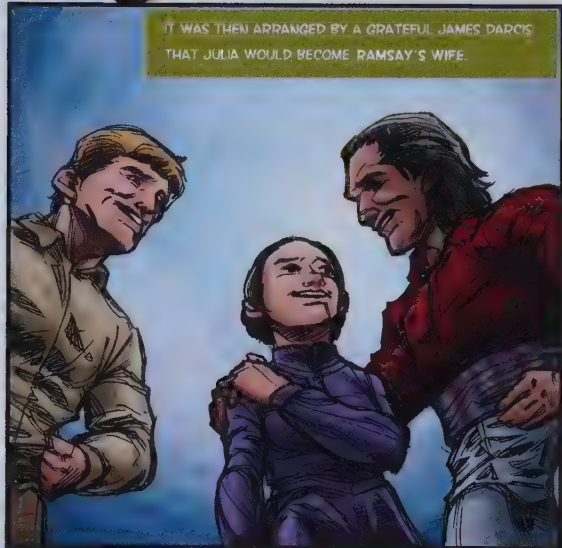
JULIA WAS JAMES'S DAUGHTER. IN THE SPRING OF 1890, SHE WAS PLAYING ON THE SWING WHEN SHE SAW RAMSAY AND HER FATHER SPEAKING.



JAMES DARCIS, HIS WIFE, AND HIS THREE CHILDREN RECEIVED LOTS OF HELP FROM RAMSAY OVER THE WINTER OF 1890 — A HARSH WINTER WITH HEAVY SNOW. RAMSAY HELPED THE FAMILY BY PROVIDING THEM WITH ENOUGH MOOSE TO KEEP THEM ALIVE.



IT WAS THEN ARRANGED BY A GRATEFUL JAMES DARCIS THAT JULIA WOULD BECOME RAMSAY'S WIFE.

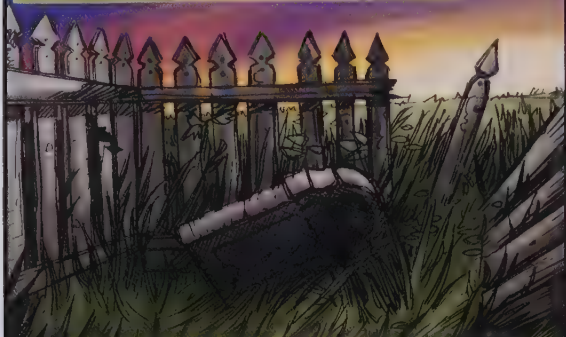


JULIA WENT TO LIVE AT



FROM WASHOW BAY, JULIA AND JOHN WENT TO LIVE AT DOG HEAD, THEN ONTO SNAKE ISLAND, WHERE THEY BOTH LIVED OUT THE REST OF THEIR DAYS. IT ISN'T CERTAIN WHEN RAMSAY DIED, BUT HE WAS LAST SEEN AT THE ICELANDIC RIVER IN 1896.

AT THE TIME OF RAMSAY'S DEATH, HE WAS WORRIED ABOUT THE STATE OF BETSEY'S GRAVE. HE HAD MARRIED TWICE AFTER HER, BUT SHE REMAINED HIS TRUE LOVE.



FISHERMEN HAD SAID THE FENCE RAMSAY HAD BUILT WAS BROKEN DOWN. THE WINDY STORM HAD BEEN BLOWING OVER HIM AND EXPOSED TO THE ELEMENTS. HE TRIED TO GET SOMEBODY TO REPLACE THE FENCE, BUT HIS PLEAS WENT UNANSWERED.

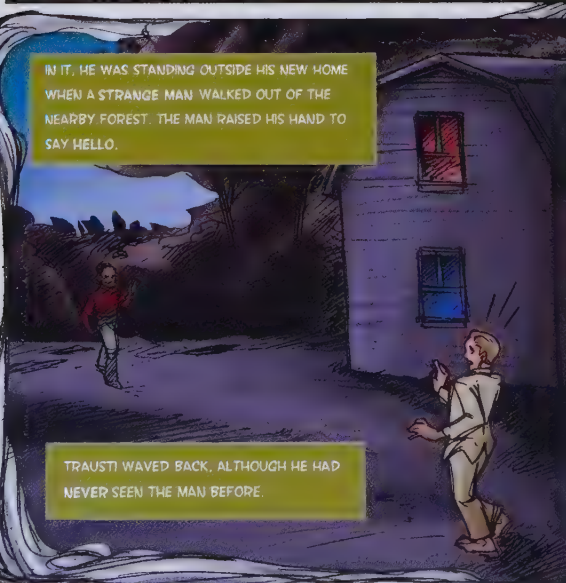
WHAT FOLLOWS IS THE STUFF OF LEGEND. IN 1910, TRAUSTI VIGFUSSON BUILT A HOME IN GEYSIR. AFTER THE HOUSE HAD BEEN BUILT



TRAUSTI HAD A VERY BIG DREAM



IN IT, HE WAS STANDING OUTSIDE HIS NEW HOME WHEN A STRANGE MAN WALKED OUT OF THE NEARBY FOREST. THE MAN RAISED HIS HAND TO SAY HELLO.



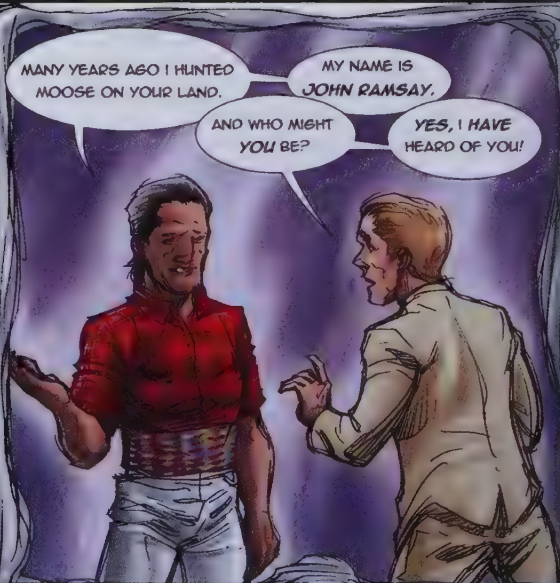
TRAUSTI WAVED BACK, ALTHOUGH HE HAD NEVER SEEN THE MAN BEFORE.

MANY YEARS AGO I HUNTED MOOSE ON YOUR LAND.

MY NAME IS JOHN RAMSAY.

AND WHO MIGHT YOU BE?

YES, I HAVE HEARD OF YOU!





IT WAS YOU WHO HELPED THE SETTLERS WHEN THEY FIRST MOVED TO THIS AREA.

YES.

YOU ARE HONOURED AMONG US, AND REMEMBERED FONDLY.

THANK YOU.

I WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU A FAVOUR, TRAILIST.

YES, ANYTHING.

I WOULD LIKE YOU TO BUILD A FENCE.

A FENCE? WHAT DO YOU MEAN A FENCE? WHERE?

AT SANDY BAR.

I LIVED IN SANDY BAR WITH MY PEOPLE UNTIL THE BIG DEATH CAME. IT TOOK MY WIFE AND MY FAMILY. I BURIED HER THERE. AND TO MARK HER RESTING PLACE I BOUGHT A BEAUTIFUL MARBLE STONE.



I BUILT A FENCE THERE, TOO, TO PROTECT HER RESTING PLACE. SADLY, THE FENCE IS GONE NOW, BROKEN DOWN. THE GRAVE ...IT IS FLAT ON THE GROUND. WHEN IT BREAKS, THERE WILL BE NOTHING LEFT. PLEASE REBUILD THE FENCE.

I WOULD LOVE TO HELP, BUT I AM POOR AND HAVEN'T THE MONEY.

I'M SURE OLD FRIENDS YOU HELPED WOULD, IN TURN, HELP YOU, WOULDN'T THEY?

NO. THEY DON'T LISTEN ANY LONGER. IT HAS TO BE YOU. I KNOW YOU ARE AN EXCELLENT CARPENTER.

I DON'T LOVE BETSEY ANY LESS NOW THAT I AM DEAD.

PLEASE, DO NOT FAIL ME.

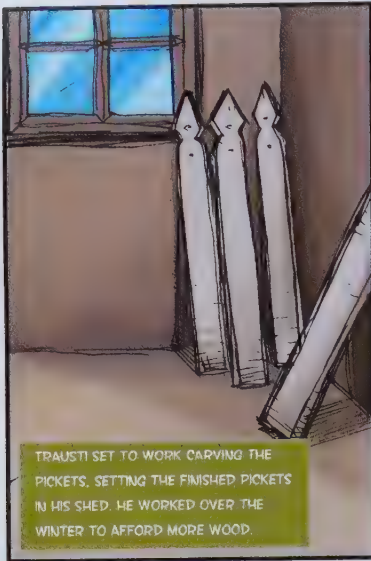
HER RESTING PLACE CAN'T BE LOST AND FORGOTTEN.

OKAY, I'LL DO IT AS SOON AS I HAVE THE MONEY AND THE TIME.

THANK YOU.

I WILL FIND A WAY TO REPAY YOU.

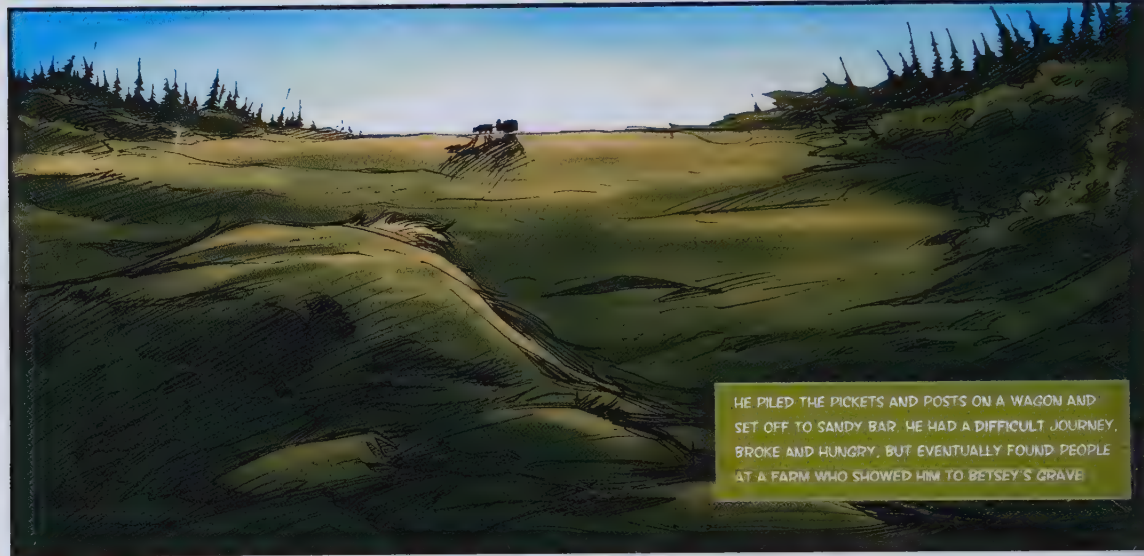




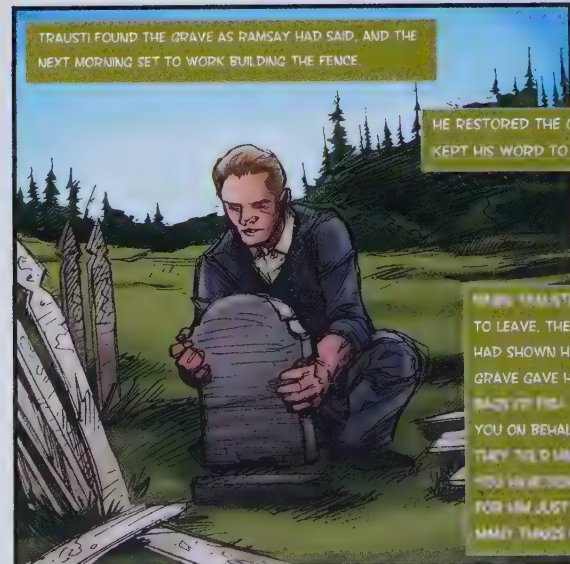
TRAUSTI SET TO WORK CARVING THE PICKETS, SETTING THE FINISHED PICKETS IN HIS SHED. HE WORKED OVER THE WINTER TO AFFORD MORE WOOD.



BY THE FOLLOWING SUMMER, HE HAD FINISHED THEM



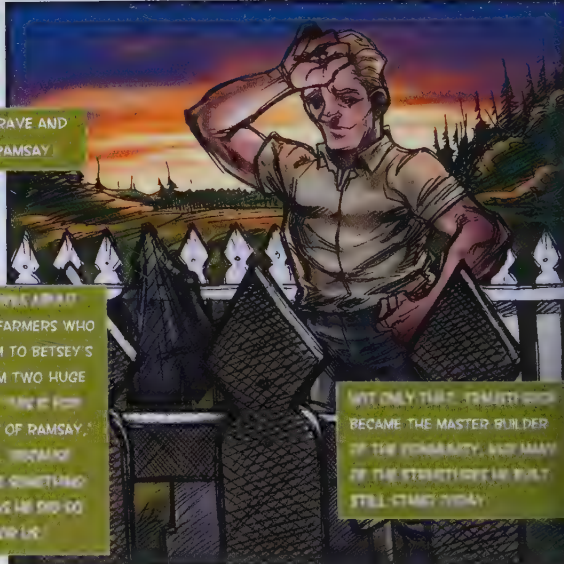
HE PILED THE PICKETS AND POSTS ON A WAGON AND SET OFF TO SANDY BAR. HE HAD A DIFFICULT JOURNEY, BROKE AND HUNGRY, BUT EVENTUALLY FOUND PEOPLE AT A FARM WHO SHOWED HIM TO BETSEY'S GRAVE



TRAUSTI FOUND THE GRAVE AS RAMSAY HAD SAID, AND THE NEXT MORNING SET TO WORK BUILDING THE FENCE

HE RESTORED THE GRAVE AND KEPT HIS WORD TO RAMSAY

WHEN TRAUSTI WAS ABOUT TO LEAVE, THE FARMERS WHO HAD SHOWN HIM TO BETSEY'S GRAVE GAVE HIM TWO HUGE BAGS OF FLOUR. "THIS IS FOR YOU ON BEHALF OF RAMSAY," THEY TOLD HIM. "BECAUSE YOU'VE DONE SOMETHING FOR HIM JUST AS HE DID SO MANY THINGS FOR US."



NOT ONLY THAT, TRAUSTI WHO BECAME THE MASTER BUILDER OF THE COMMUNITY, AND MANY OF THE STREETS HE BUILT STILL STAND TODAY



AND THAT, CHILDREN, IS THE STORY OF MY GRANDFATHER, JOHN RAMSAY. WITHOUT HIM, WHO KNOWS WHAT MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED TO THE ICELANDIC SETTLERS?

IN ICELAND, THEY STILL CELEBRATE HIS DEEDS TODAY.



THIS IS WHAT I'M SUPPOSED TO DO.



DARN IT!

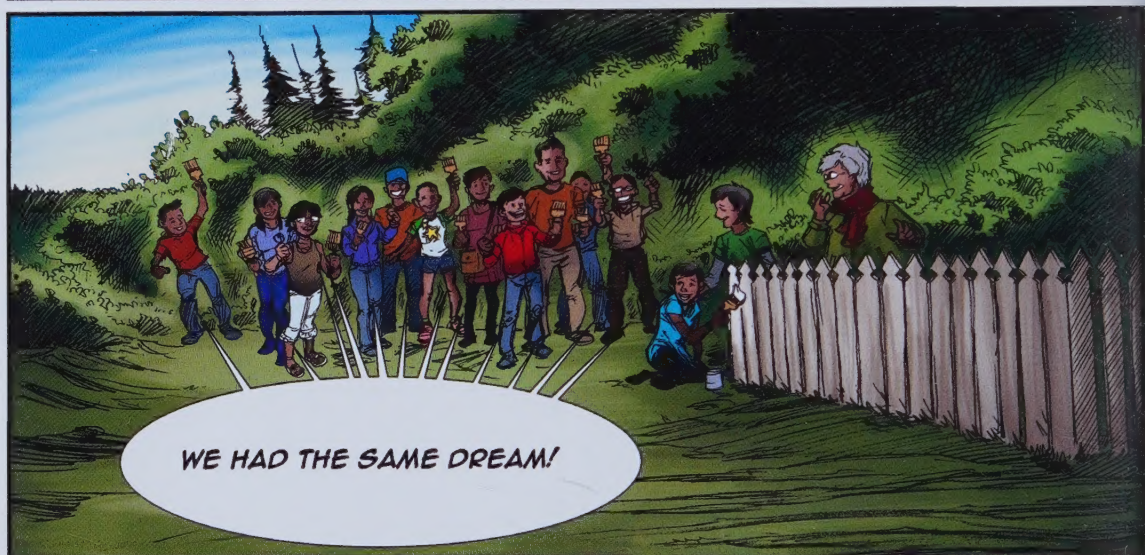
WHAT IS IT, CHILD?

IT'S JUST THAT ...I PROMISED THAT I'D DO SOMETHING AND NOW I CAN'T EVEN DO IT.

WHY'S THAT?

CUZ I DON'T HAVE A PAINTBRUSH.

WAIT A SECOND...



When Richard's class from Big Spirit School takes a canoe trip, he and his classmates chance upon an elderly woman. She tells them the story of her grandfather, John Ramsay, of the Sandy Bar community on Lake Winnipeg. Ramsay's land was taken by the government and given to the new settlers from Iceland who arrived there in 1875. Yet many owed their survival to Ramsay, who helped them through freezing winters, hunger, and a devastating smallpox epidemic.

Tales from Big Spirit is a unique six-book graphic novel series that delves into the stories of some of the great Indigenous figures from Canadian history – some already well known and others who deserve to be. Other titles in the series include *The Peacemaker* (Thanadelthur), *The Rebel* (Gabriel Dumont), *The Ballad of Nancy April* (Shawnadithit), *The Scout* (Tommy Prince), and *The Poet* (Pauline Johnson).



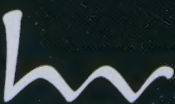
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Alexander Robertson is author of the novel *The Evolution of Alice*, as well as the graphic novels *The Life of Helen Betty Osborne*, *7 Generations: A Plains Cree Saga*, and *Sugar Falls: A Residential School Story*. David's work has also been featured in the anthology *Manitowapow: Aboriginal Writings from the Land of Water*. He is currently co-creator and a writer for the television series, *The Reckoner*.



ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Wai Tien graduated with honours from the School of Art at the University of Manitoba. When he's not busy drawing comics or painting murals, Wai pulls double duty on guitar and vocals with his band, All On Red. He also illustrated another graphic novel in the series, *The Peacemaker: Thanadelthur*.


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